

Cervical Cancer: What You Should Know



Every year approximately 15,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and about 5,000 women lose their lives to cervical cancer each year in the U.S.

Precancerous changes of the cervix usually do not cause pain. In fact, they generally do not display symptoms and are not detected unless a woman has a Pap test and pelvic exam.

Detection of Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer can be prevented most of the time, if it is caught and treated early. The best way to detect cervical cancer early is with a Pap test. This is a simple procedure in which the doctor will take a swab or brush and gather cells from the opening of the cervix and will either place those cells on a glass slide or in liquid. Some women report mild discomfort during the test, but it generally does not hurt.

Results of the Pap test will either show normal or abnormal cells. If the cells are normal, you will likely be asked to come back for another Pap test in one to three years.

If the cells are abnormal, the doctor may ask you to come back for a colposcopy and a biopsy. A colposcopy is an examination of the cervix which involves a scope that has a light and magnifying device on it. The results of this test will tell the doctor if you have abnormal cells in your cervix.

If the results of the biopsy show normal cells, no treatment is needed, and you should check with your doctor to find out how often you should have a Pap test. If the biopsy shows abnormal cells, treatment may be needed. Discuss with your doctor the various treatment options.

Screening women using the Pap test is an important strategy that can prevent cervical cancer from developing most of the time by finding lesions at an early stage when they can be removed, and before they become cancer.

Symptoms of cervical cancer:

- In its early stage, cervical cancer shows no symptoms
- Irregular bleeding
- Bleeding or pain during sexual contact
- Vaginal discharge

Please see reverse

Risk Factors:

- Smoking cigarettes
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection
- Not using condoms properly or every time
- Having sex at an early age or having many sexual partners
- Having sex with a partner who has/had many sexual partners
- Having a history of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Having a compromised immune system

Facts about Cancer and Precancerous Changes of the Cervix:

- Cervical cancer is a common kind of cancer in women.
- It is a disease in which cancer (malignant) cells are found in the tissues of the cervix.
- Cancer of the cervix usually grows slowly over a period of time.
- The change from normal to pre-cancer to cancer is usually gradual.
- Before cancer cells are found on the cervix, the tissues of the cervix go through changes in which cells that are not normal begin to appear (known as dysplasia).
- Later, cancer cells start to grow and spread more deeply into the cervix and to surrounding areas.
- There are two main types of cervical cancers: 1) squamous cells carcinomas (about 85-90% of all cervical cancers) that begin to develop in the outer cervix and 2) adenocarcinomas (remaining 10-15% of all cervical cancers) that develop in the mucus-producing gland cells of the inner cervix.

Additional Resources:

National Cancer Institute	www.cancer.gov
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention	www.cdc.gov/cancer
National Cervical Cancer Coalition	www.nccc-online.org

For More Information:

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